

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COTONO 00370 201600Z

61

ACTION AID-59

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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 7011

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: EAID, DM

SUBJ: FOOD SHIPMENTS COTONOU TO GAO

REF A. ABIDJAN 2165 B. NIAMEY 883

1. 10,300 MT FOOD DOES NOT EXCEED THE THEORETICAL CAPACITY OF THE COTONOU-GAO TRANSPORT SYSTEM OVER THE NEXT THREE MONTHS. THE BOTTLENECK OF THE SYSTEM IS THE COTONOU-PARAKOU LINK WHICH MUST BE HANDLED BY THE RAILWAY (OCDN). WILL FULL PRIORITY, THE OCDN HAS IN THE PAST BEEN ABLE TO AVERAGE 360 MT/DAY OF FOOD FROM COTONOU TO PARAKOU. AT THIS LEVEL, THE FOOD IN AZESTION REPRESENTS LESS THAN ONE MONTH'S RAIL CAPACITY, WHILE THE 500 MT FED FOOD NOW BEING OFF-LOADED, AND THE 8000 MT CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION EXPECTED IN APRIL SHOULD BE CLEARED OUT IN EARLY MAY IF THE SYSTEM IS FUNCTIONING SMOOTHLY.

2. THE SYSTEM MAY NOT, HOWEVER, FUNCTION SMOOTHLY. THE RAILWAY IS NOW TRANSPORTING ONLY 160 MT/DAY OF FOOD. THIS FIGURE CAN PROBABLY BE RAISED, BUT POOR MAINTENANCE, ACCID-
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PAGE 02 COTONO 00370 201600Z

ENTS, COMMERCIAL DEMANDS PLACED ON THE RAIL SYSTEM BY COTTON

AND FERTILIZER, THE FLOW OF NIGERIAN GOODS PASSING THROUGH THE PORT, LACK OF INITIAL FEELINGS OF URGENCY ASSOCIATED WITH THE SAHEL DISASTER, POTENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONALIZATION OF FREIGHT FORWARDERS, AND REPORTED (BY WFP) DETERIORATION OF MRGD CAPACITY AND GOOD WILL ALL MAKE IT IMPROBABLY THAT 360 MT/DAY WILL BE AVERAGED AGAIN IN THE NEAR FUTURE. EVEN IF IT WERE, THE PORT COULD BE INUNDATED BY UNANTICIPATED SHIPMENTS AS IT HAS BEEN IN THE PAST. IN ADDITION, COMPLETE WORK STOPPAGE DUE TO A STRIKE BY THE WORKERS WHO TRANSFER GOODS FROM TRAINS TO TRUCKS IN PARAKOU, LACK OF ENTHUSIASM ON THE PART OF TRUCKERS TO MAKE THE GAO RUN WHICH WAS FROUGHT WITH SO MANY PROBLEMS LAST YEAR, REPETITION OF BORDER PROBLEMS OF LAST YEAR, AND CLOSURE OF THE AYOROU-GAO LINK BY EARLY RAINS ALL REPRESENT POTENTIAL CONTRITEMPS AFTER THE COTONOU-PARAKOU BOTTLENECK IS PASSED.

3. IN VIEW OF ABOVE, BELIEVE IT IMPRUDENT TO RELY EXCLUSIVELY ON COTONOU TO SUPPLY 10,300 MT FOOD TO GAO DESPITE FACT THAT CAPACITY CLEARLY EXISTS IF ALL GOES WELL. SUGGEST THAT OPTIONS BE PRESERVED TO ALLOW SHIPS TO OFF-LOAD LOME, AND SHIP FOOD VIA UPPER VOLTA IF COTONOU-GAO LINK BREAKS DOWN. RECOGNIZE THAT LOME ROUTE MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE, BUT TOO MANY POTENTIAL BREAKDOWN POINTS EXIST IN COTONOU-GAO ROUTE TO RELY ON IT WITHOUT ALTERNATIVES.

4. NO GAO SHIPMENTS SHOULD ARRIVE COTONOU BEFORE MAY TO ALLOW OTHER DONORS' FOOD TO CLEAR PORT. THEREAFTER, FOOD SHOULD NOT ARRIVE IN TRANCHES OF OVER 2500 MT TO AVOID PORT CONGESTION, AND TO ALLOW ASSESSMENT OF HANDLING UNDER CONDITIONS THAT EXIST AT THAT TIME. FIRST SHIPMENT SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY TARPS IN CASE OUTDOOR STORAGE NECESSARY.
ENGLE

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